

Congressman Robert Wexler
Statement
Europe and Emerging Threats Subcommittee Hearing
March 8, 2006

Chairman Gallegly, I want to thank you for holding today's hearing on "What is Next for the US-European Relations." I also want to thank Assistant Secretary Fried for testifying before the subcommittee today. I can say without hesitation that under Ambassador Fried's stewardship American's relations and cooperation with our European allies particularly in the European Union and NATO are stronger than they have been in many years and we are fortunate to have him in such a critical position.

Mr. Chairman, having just traveled to Brussels and Vienna to meet with EU leaders including Foreign Policy Chief Solana -- I have no doubt in my mind that the strategy laid out by the Bush Administration following the President's inauguration last January to move the United States closer to our European allies has been critical to addressing the security, defense and economic challenges facing both sides of the Atlantic. I also believe the President's historic trip to EU headquarters -- the first by an American President -- was an important signal to the EU and its member states that the Bush Administration now views Brussels in a new light as an equal partner with the respect is so rightfully deserves.

While there is still fallout in Europe and globally from our disastrous Iraq policy -- which not only strained American's relations with Europe but also created an undesirable split within the EU -- it has become increasingly apparent that the US-EU foreign policy agendas are joined at the hip. The most successful model of US-EU cooperation has been the EU3 negotiations with Iran, which has been effective along with closely coordinated efforts in dealing with the recent election of Hamas, rebuilding and providing greater security in Afghanistan, continuing to support the goals of democratization and prosperity in Ukraine, Georgia, the Balkans and Belarus, preventing genocide in Darfur and ending Syrian control from Lebanon.

Preventing the Iranian regime from obtaining nuclear weapons is the most significant challenge facing the US, EU and international community. I have been impressed by the EU3's resolve in the face of constant Iranian intransigence and deception. With no daylight between the US and EU, we have been able to build a broad international coalition both at the IAEA and at the UN; this needs to continue. Without this cooperation it would have been impossible to bring China, Russia, India and countries such as Yemen and Egypt to support our efforts at the IAEA and eventually to the Security Council. It is critical that this joint effort continue and that the Iran's effort to split the US-EU front is not successful -- nor can we afford to capitulate and support any deal with Tehran that allows them even limited amount of nuclear fuel on its own territory.

In addition to strengthening US-EU relations the Transatlantic community's efforts to ensure global stability, security and freedom will not be realized unless a robust and transformed NATO is prepared to deal with a growing array of international threats and catastrophes. Since the end of the Cold War, the international community has experienced profound change culminating with September 11th and the onset of the war on terror. Facing new global realities, NATO's -- still the most important guarantor of security in the West -- has shifted in the past ten years from defending Europe to peacekeeping operations and rebuilding in the Balkans, leading post-war stabilization efforts in Afghanistan, and providing logistical assistance in Iraq and Sudan.

The scope of NATO's international role has shifted since its inception, and its theater of operations has expanded well beyond Europe to include the Middle East, Central Asia, and Africa. At this juncture, NATO, which is set to meet in Riga in November, must set in motion an effort to include democratic allies such as Australia, New Zealand, South Korea, Japan and Israel -- who possess the desire, capability, and experience to enhance NATO's capabilities and bolster its strategic depth. In addition, we need to upgrade NATO relations with states participating in the Mediterranean Dialogue, Partnership for Peace and the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative with NATO, which would be mutually beneficial to NATO and these countries.

Mr. Chairman, Assistant Secretary Fried has one of the most important and difficult jobs in Washington, which is to maintain and strengthen America's most important alliances with our European allies and help transform NATO so it can address the greatest challenges of the 21st century. Undoubtedly the transatlantic relationship will be tested as it was often during the cold war. I believe the Administration has learned important lessons from its experiences leading up to and after the war in Iraq -- that it is not in our interests to have a divided America and Europe.